More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI)

FINAL REPORT

YUMI as Leaders

YUMI Education Inc.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Government employment data indicates:

• 64% of the combined Tagai State College and NPAC workforce identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

• Despite the existence of RATEP and other indigenous teacher recruitment strategies being in place since 1990, less than 22% of classified officers (“educational leaders”) are indigenous. Conversely, 87% and 84% of education support and ancillary staff respectively are of Torres Strait Islander background.

• Historically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders are retained substantially longer in their leadership role within the region than their non-indigenous colleagues.

Increased retention, combined with the unique cultural experience, knowledge and abilities that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders inherently bring to their work, place their engagement as fundamental to the success of education in the region.

• Historically, professional support for aspirant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education leaders in the region has been limited by:

  • Few relief staff to accommodate school term absences
  • Low enrolment and retention in post-graduate studies
  • High cost of travel for professional mentors
  • Lack of appreciation of the important role played by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education leaders by employing agencies

1.2 Key Deliverables

A focused strategy to establish a formal leadership development program for aspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders teachers in the Torres Strait and NPA region, would deliver:

• Mapping of aspirant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders education leaders in the Torres Strait and NPA region

• Mapping of future educational leadership roles and career pathways within the region for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers

• Individualised leadership plans for at least 3 aspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders teachers and 3 existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders leaders in the Torres Strait and NPA region

• A professional summer-school program* for aspirant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders education leaders, focusing on:
  o Leadership skills
  o Educational management skills
  o Classified position selection processes

• Through the summer-school program, aspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders leaders are provided direct experience in educational leadership training courses and/or post-graduate degree programs
1.3 Proposed Strategy

Over an 18-month period, an experience professional mentor would:

- Work with representatives from the State Government, schools and TSIREC to identify future educational leadership roles within the Far North Queensland region for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers
- Work with representatives from the State Government, schools and TSIREC to identify future educational leaders within the current cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers
- Formalise the application process for aspirant and existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to participate in the leadership program
- Work individually with successful applicants to develop leadership objectives and identify professional experiences and academic study needs
- Document applicants’ individual leadership plans
- Negotiate with State Government and schools to facilitate the professional experience needs of applicants
- Engage with University, TAFE and State Government agencies to develop a suite of summer-school program offerings – primarily components of existing training courses and/or post-graduate degree programs
- Coordinate a 1-2 week summer school program for applicants over the December/January school vacation

2 Outcomes

Through the delivery of this formal leadership development program, the following outcomes have been achieved:

Program
- Mapping of aspirant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders education leaders in the Torres Strait and NPA region with the leadership of Tagai College, Yumi and TSIREC
- Mapping of future educational leadership roles and career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers
- Facilitating a targeted educational leadership development program for aspirant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders education leaders, focusing on: Leadership skills, Educational management skills and Classified position selection processes

The following teachers participated in the program during 2013 following identification by the Tagai executive during planning meetings in the Torres Strait in 2012 and reviewed in 2013, Yumi Education Inc, and TSIREC as suitable for the program. Tagai College has included this program in their suit of staff development activities:

- Keith Pabai, Head of Malu Kiyay campus
- Suberia Bowie, Head of Department Tagai Secondary campus
- Deb Belyea, Language and Culture Centre
- Richard Matthew, Year 8 coordinator, Secondary Campus
- Matilda Loban, Teacher, Secondary Campus
- Lisa Loban, Primary teacher, Thursday Island Campus

Strategies
1. Individualised leadership plans for aspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders teachers and existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders leaders in the Torres Strait.

   - Each participant has an individual plan which has been continually reviewed throughout the year. These plans have resulted in a number of actions for 2014 that have variously included a participant seeking and receiving a transfer to an outer island campus to understudy campus leadership and prepare for her own school, another participant has reached interview stage for a head of campus in 2014 and is awaiting the outcome,
one participant is determining whether to follow a secondary path after being offered a Head of Department position in 2014 and a further secondary participant is consolidating her readiness to seek a deputy principal role in the secondary campus. There are enhanced opportunities in the secondary campus because of the number of leadership positions and the support immediately available. The College executive and in particular the College Director has provided excellent support to each participant taking a personal interest in their Individual Development Plans. This support has been greatly valued by the participants.

- The core of the coaching sessions has responded to each person’s current needs and has built around an identified leadership initiative relevant to each workplace. The initiative(s) will ultimately be reported on together with the key learnings at a one day end of program reporting session. An example of the initiative of two participants is attached. They are working together to build student understanding of career opportunities and in particular to encourage Torres Strait students and young people to consider teaching as a career. They presented their work at the recent MATSITI Conference in Adelaide.

2. Identifying future tertiary education or leadership experience options for aspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders leaders. One participant is currently doing a Master in Education and a second student is considering commencing study in a Master’s program in 2014.

3. Progress of each participant has been reviewed with their supervisor(s) each semester and the programs adjusted as required.

4. Participants are expected to partner with a buddy on the program to share learning and challenge each other’s progress. An example of that partnership has been given. Further sharing between the group will be structured.

5. It is planned to workshop with spouses as they a key support role to leadership aspirants

### 3 Observations

There is evidence that Torres Strait staff can face a number of challenges in addition to the normal challenges faced by staff seeking promotion to leadership positions. These include family commitments, health, women in a patriarchal community, language and remote service.

- **Family commitments:** Family creates a number of demands on leadership aspirants above what usually be expected. Because of their evident leadership capability they often are a key figure in an extended family and are called upon to manage family concerns and ceremonies as well as play a key role in community life. Most of the aspirants are, as is the case in the industry generally, female and therefore mothers with the demands of children and spouses to also manage. Women are faced with the difficulty of gaining their husband’s support which may include his relocation for work as well. School leaders encouraging aspirants need to be cogniscente of these issues and deal with them in a sensitive manner. In the Tagai instance the Executive Principal has kept oversight of these issues and therefor has displayed as a mentor great insight and support to the women in the program.

- **Health:** As with most Indigenous people health is an ongoing serious concern. This issue is not always appreciated by Non Indigenous leaders and can be a source of conflict. It can also weigh on the minds of leadership aspirants who not only will have concerns about their own health but that of relatives and their children.

- **Women:** Teaching is of course a female dominated industry and therefore many of the aspiring and capable staff will be women. As well as family commitments there are the challenges of a female leader in a culture that traditional perceives males as the leaders. This can impact on community, peer and staff perceptions and demands a high level of resilience from the female leader. There is a strong argument to work with spouses to build understanding. The College Director and the consultant are considering a workshop of participants and their spouses to explore these issues.

- **Language:** For some of the participants English is their third language after their traditional language (eg Kalaw Kawaw Ya), Torres Strait Creole as the home language and finally English as the language of instruction
and spoken predominantly only in school. The leadership of schools continues to grow in complexity as accountability demands grow and the use of communications technology escalates. These trends do not make school leadership for second or third language speakers. The issue can be exacerbated if supervisors have English as their only language and may not recognise the struggle to understand and enact the large number of documented requirements.

• Remote Service: The challenge of developing leadership in remote areas is made more difficult by isolation and access to likeminded peers, the cost and access to professional development and the limited access to role models and mentors. The structure of Tagai College and the current Torres Strait Islander composition of the executive of the college has been a major support to this program. Such support would not be available in many areas of the country.